

H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY."

SECRET.

24th June, 1940.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report on the operations of Seagull A2/21 on Friday, 21st June, 1940.

2. Aircraft was launched at 0511 and in accordance with previous instructions started to gain height remaining to the Eastward of the Squadron. Whilst climbing three fighter aircraft in formation were sighted and were judged to be Gladiators. Their camouflage and fuselage markings appeared to be the same as ours. The underside of their lower wings was not visible. We also sighted a Blenheim going in the direction of Tobruk. No more thought was given to the fighters as we had been informed that the Royal Air Force were co-operating and so felt quite safe. When we'd attained 9000 feet we flattened out and proceeded into position for spotting. The visibility was excellent and the targets clearly visible. I saw H.M.S. "ORION", Battleship "LORRAINE" and H.M.S. "NEPTUNE" go into action and one of Battleship "LORRAINE's" first two shots scored a hit in the south west part of the citadel. Flashes from what appeared to be an Anti Aircraft Battery were sighted a little to the east of Point 'D' on the edge of the Wadi Jerfan. Shells were also seen to be bursting in that vicinity.
3. H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY's" first salvo was unobserved and the second far over. This was signalled and the third was observed to fall coincidentally with a sound of splintering wood and the next moment we were in a steep dive and I was going forward into the front gun position. It was at this time that I had my only glimpse of the aircraft which attacked us and all I noticed was a wing like this and part of the fuselage, and that the underside of the wing appeared a dark brown. No markings were observed. No further attack was made on us. The Telegraphist Air Gunner was making a final check of his wireless at that moment, rendered necessary as the proposal to fit a plug in the rear cockpit had not been authorised (see my letter of 23rd May, 1939, and Air Board's letter 9/5/108 of 10th October, 1939). He was back in a flash, saw two fighters, one of which had attacked us, but was unable to open fire in time.
4. I came back at a signal from the pilot and made a forced landing signal saying that we were going to make a forced landing at Sollum as our ailerons were carried away. This I later discovered never got through. Then when we'd flattened out close to the water the pilot said he thought he could make Mersa Matruh if nothing carried away. I made a signal to that effect but once more it didn't get through and the set seemed dead. After a time the Telegraphist was allowed forward to his position and I asked him about the set. He found the aerial had become disconnected and corrected the fault. We found later that a portion of the trailing aerial had also carried away. He made the message direct on our spotting wave and then getting no answer broadcast it. This was received in H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY", mutilated at 0647. He then went over to Reconnaissance Wave and re-broadcast the message. This was received by H.M.S. "ORION" at about 0652.
5. At about 0630 we were joined by three Gladiators in the vicinity of Sidi Barrani and they escorted us for about five minutes before going off inland.
6. About 0715 we landed at Mersa Matruh and our port under-carriage gave way on landing.
7. I thoroughly commend the action of the pilot in deciding to fly the extra 100 miles to Mersa Matruh and for arriving there safely and consider it a very creditable feat of airmanship.
8. Arriving at Mersa Matruh we found only a small advance unit of the Royal Air Force in charge of a Pilot Officer. He was most

helpful and did all he could to assist. Captain H.L.I., the Army Adjutant was also most helpful in endeavouring to find transport for our essential equipment. My intention was to get back as soon as possible with as much essential equipment for equipping a new aircraft as possible in case we were to take one over from one of the other ships.

9. About 0800 the other aircraft from the squadron had arrived on the lagoon and I went down to see them. The pilot of Battleship "LORRAINE's" aircraft said he could take one of us back plus about 80 lbs. of equipment so I went with him, leaving at 1145, with our two Lewis Guns and Confidential Books. I left Flight Lieutenant Price and the Telegraphist to come back by road or the next train. (His report on the damage done and the action taken is enclosed).

10. On arrival at Alexandria I reported onboard H.M.S. "WARSPITE" to the Fleet Aviation Officer and then returned to M.V. "DUMANA" where everything possible was done for my comfort and in which ship I remained until H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY" returned to harbour.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant.

(Sgd.) J. C. Bacon.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER (O) R.N.

The Commanding Officer,
H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY."

R.A.A.F. IN ACTION

PILOT'S FINE AIRMANSHIP AT BOMBARDMENT OF BARDIA.

Fine airmanship on the part of Flight Lieutenant Thomas McBride Price, of the Royal Australian Air Force, at the bombardment of Bardia on the 21st June, is described in a report of the operations forwarded to the Naval Board by Captain J. Collins R.A.N., Commanding Officer of H.M.A.S. "SYDNEY".

Flight Lieutenant Price, piloting a Seagull aircraft from the "SYDNEY", with Lieutenant-Commander Bacon of that ship as observer, was engaged in spotting duties in co-operation with the Naval Forces attacking the Italian position. When at a height of 9,000 feet, the Seagull was suddenly attacked by a formation of three Italian fighters, which dived from cloud above and to the rear.

The first indication of the attack was the sound of machine-gun fire. Flight Lieutenant Price immediately tried to bring his front and rear guns to bear on the enemy, but a second burst of fire severed the aileron control wires, and the Seagull went into a steep dive.

The pilot managed to regain control at approximately 2,000 feet, and, the aircraft having been badly hit, decided to attempt a forced landing at El Sollum, a few miles along the coast and about 10 miles inside the Egyptian border.

The country at El Sollum proved to be unsuitable for a forced landing, and Flight Lieutenant Price was left with the alternative of landing on the sea or making for an advance base of the Royal Air Force at Mersa Matruh, 100 miles farther to the Eastward. He decided on this second course in spite of the damaged condition of the aircraft, which made the journey difficult and hazardous. The tail plane struts of the machine had been almost shot away, the after part of the hull and fin badly riddled, and the main spar of the lower main plane had been damaged in addition to the severed aileron control wires.

The flight, however, was made successfully. Flight Lieutenant Price instructed his crew to tighten their safety belts and prepare for a crash landing. This he carried out on arrival at Mersa Matruh without any injury to personnel, though the port landing wheel collapsed and the aircraft skidded along on one wing when landing.

It was due to the pilot's skill and decision that there were no casualties, and that the engine and other valuable parts of the plane were salvaged. Captain Collins, in his report, commented highly on the skilful manner in which Flight Lieutenant Price brought his badly damaged machine back to British territory.